



## NEWS RELEASE

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **The Nature Conservancy and NOAA Partner to Restore Habitat of America's Aquatic Great Places**

WASHINGTON, D.C. June 11, 2002—The Nature Conservancy, an organization best known for helping to conserve large landscapes, has teamed up with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in a three-year partnership to restore habitat in some of America's most valuable coastal ecosystems.

Projects are underway in such diverse places as California's Santa Clara River, the Chesapeake Bay watershed, Oregon's Siuslaw and Long Island's Peconic and South Shore estuaries, the beaches of Delaware, Texas's Croaker Hole Complex, the Florida Keys, and North Carolina's Pamlico Sound. Project ideas for the partnership's second year are currently being solicited, with grant money available for eligible communities within states containing anadromous, estuarine, and marine species and their habitats.

"This partnership comes at an exciting time in The Nature Conservancy's fifty-year history because we are launching new Freshwater and Marine Initiatives in order to more effectively protect aquatic species and habitats," said Steve McCormick, The Nature Conservancy's President and CEO. "Although we have enjoyed working with a number of federal agencies, our relationship with NOAA is relatively new and very exciting. We can't wait to grow this partnership, and to explore similar opportunities to work together in the future."

During the partnership's first year, The Nature Conservancy coordinated public and private partners, and local communities, to match and further leverage NOAA's Community-Based Restoration Program \$400,000 challenge grant to jump-start local restoration projects. The total value of this collaboration is expected to exceed \$4 million over its three-year lifespan. Projects, jointly developed by the NOAA Restoration Center and The Nature Conservancy's Freshwater and Marine Initiatives, collectively cover a geographically wide range.

"The Community-Based Restoration Program has proven to be a catalyst for habitat restoration around the nation," said Bill Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries. "Working with partners like The Nature Conservancy greatly expands NOAA's ability to enhance habitats critical to sustainable fisheries and the recovery of many threatened and endangered species."

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Projects funded in the partnership's first year include:

**California** In the Los Angeles-Ventura region, removing invasive species from a segment of the Santa Clara river will contribute towards the passage and survival of migratory species of native resident and anadromous fish such as the threatened Steelhead. Partners include the California State Coastal Conservancy and others.

**Delaware** Incorporating new science into projects on the beaches of Delaware Bay will protect communities from storm damage without compromising, and even improving, habitat for spawning horseshoe crabs. Partners include the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control; Delaware Coastal Management Program; Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve; United States Geological Survey's Leetown Science Center; Delaware Fish and Wildlife Service; New Jersey Institute of Technology; the community of Pickering Beach; and the town of Bowers Beach.

**Florida** Restoring a keystone urchin in the Florida Keys will eventually lead to a decrease in abundance of algae that will ultimately help improve the health of the coral reefs. Partners include the University of North Carolina at Wilmington; NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center; and University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science.

**New York** Restoring hard clam populations will improve water quality and will increase ecosystem-wide functioning of the Peconic and South Shore estuaries with the hope of eventually reducing harmful algal blooms such as brown tide. Partners include the Town of Southampton; the Town of Shelter Island; New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; and the Peconic Estuary Program.

**North Carolina** Constructing, restoring, and monitoring an interrelated complex of oyster reef habitat within a 50-acre area of Pamlico Sound will enhance estuarine biodiversity. Partners include the University of North Carolina Institute of Marine Sciences; North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries; community volunteers, and potentially the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island; North Carolina Coastal Management Division; North Carolina SeaGrant; and Dare County public schools.

**Oregon** Controlling an invasive marsh reed on Cox Island will restore and protect important habitat in the Siuslaw estuary, and will help to prevent dispersal to other sites and possibly other estuaries in a state where a spread has become likely. Partners include the Siuslaw Watershed Council; the Northwest Service Academy; community volunteers; and potentially the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

**Texas** Reestablishing historic hydrology and providing interpretive signage within Mustang Island's Croaker Hole Complex will facilitate passage of important marine organisms and will benefit other coastal wetland dependant species such as waterfowl and wading birds. Partners include the United States Fish and Wildlife Service; the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program; Texas A&M University; Equistar Chemicals, Inc.; and local community organizations.

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**Virginia** Restoring eleven miles of reproductive habitat for anadromous fish will eventually increase access to historical fish runs in Virginia's Dragon Run and Cat Point Creek. Partners include the Tidewater Resource Conservation and Development Council; Friends of Dragon Run; Cat Point Creek Steering Committee; Center for Environmental Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University; Northern Neck Planning District Commission; Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries; Westmoreland and Richmond Counties; and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

"This partnership has provided us with the opportunity to work with stakeholders from around Pamlico Sound to begin thinking about the future of the estuary strategically and cooperatively," said Project Director Jeffrey Smith DeBlieu. "We hope it is the first step towards a much larger restoration vision for the Sound. All of our partners and potential partners have been very responsive, and we are getting a lot of support."

"This grants program is enabling us to take the first steps necessary to not only restore shellfish by increasing hard clam spawning stock, but also to evaluate whether we have found a way to make our coastal waters less susceptible to harmful algal blooms and brown tide," added Dr. Marci Bortman from the Conservancy's Peconic Estuary project.

States and territories containing anadromous, estuarine, and marine species are eligible to compete for grants typically ranging from \$25,000 to \$75,000. Project ideas for the partnership's second year are being accepted, and are due June 28, 2002. For information on guidelines and requirements, visit [www.conserveonline.org](http://www.conserveonline.org), or the NOAA Fisheries Restoration Center <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>.

The Nature Conservancy is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. In recent years, the Conservancy has escalated its efforts in priority aquatic conservation areas using the sound science, strong public and private partnerships, ecosystem approach, and community-based conservation that has proven effective throughout its fifty-year history of working on the land. To learn more about The Nature Conservancy, visit [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).

Since 1996, the NOAA Restoration Center's Community-Based Restoration Program has brought together citizens, public and non-profit organizations, watershed groups, industry, corporations and businesses, youth conservation corps, students, landowners, and local government, state, and Federal agencies to implement local habitat restoration projects. The program recognizes the significant role that partnerships can play in making habitat restoration happen within communities, and acknowledges that habitat restoration is often best implemented through technical and monetary support provided at a community level. Projects subsequently are monitored and maintained by communities, promoting stewardship and a heightened appreciation for the environment and its well being.

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